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Senate Republican Caucus Chair

Committees: Financial Institutions, Housing and Insurance; Health and Long-Term Care;
Ways and Means; Rules

Feb. 20, 2009

Dear Friends,

We are now about one-third of the way through the 2009 session. There are just a few days left to introduce legislation, and by next week bills must pass out of policy and fiscal committees or they'll be considered dead unless they are necessary to implement the budget. Several of the bills I've introduced are continuing to move through the legislative process. You'll find updates about them in this e-mail.

The news of the week was getting a preview of the state budget forecast on Thursday; everything else quickly fell into the background as legislators focused on the new figures.

Preview of March revenue forecast shows downward trend continues

On February 19, legislators were told in a special preview of the March revenue forecast that we have now moved from a nearly \$6 billion deficit to an \$8 billion deficit. Expecting this, some legislators have said they are considering a [tax package](#) for the November ballot. This is not necessary, and would be harmful to our already faltering economy. Consider this: the amount of money the state collects will actually be [greater next year](#) than this year. By prioritizing spending, making appropriate reductions and keeping our budget within available revenues, the state can balance its budget without raising taxes.

Tax Watch

Here are some bills we are watching that would impose new taxes on citizens and employers:

- [SJR 8205/SB 5104](#) – State income tax
- [SB 5393](#) – New tax on homeowner insurance policies
- [SB 5432](#) – Raises I-747 limit on total property tax collections for some taxing districts
- [SB 5518](#) – New tax on petroleum products
- [SB 5626](#) – New tax on cigarettes
- [SB 5608](#) – Hike in state property tax for school funding
- [SB 5747](#) – New tax on plastic manufacturing businesses
- [SB 5735](#) – “Cap and Trade” plan, potentially the largest middle class tax increase in history
- [SB 5679](#) – New payroll tax to support paid family leave
- [SB 5911](#) – B&O tax on farms, sales tax on farm auctions
- [SB 5945](#) – New payroll tax to provide government sponsored universal health care insurance

Bill would aid school districts with their levies

This year I have introduced a bill that would amend Washington's Constitution to allow school districts to change the timing on their school levies. Under current law, school districts can run levies at a special or regular election, but cannot do so more than twice in one year, and not more than 12 months prior to the inception of the levy. The 12-month requirement is a practical obstacle for some school districts seeking to run a November levy because the levy would go into effect in the spring. Since the vote and collection of the levy would occur in the same school year, it is nearly impossible for the school to budget for the year without knowing whether the levy would pass. Under [Senate Bill 5887](#), the time period between the date a school district puts its levy on the ballot and the time the levy is collected could be expanded up to 18 months. This would make it easier for school districts to plan their budgets. SB 5887 had a hearing on Thursday in the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Committee. This bill will be studied over the interim.

Bills ready for a full Senate vote

Several of the other bills I sponsored this year have passed out of their committees and are ready for a full Senate vote:

- **Bill to aid young drivers.** [Senate Bill 5469](#) says that, for drivers with an intermediate driver's license, being in an accident is no longer grounds for denying lifting the license restrictions if there is another party to the accident and the other party was cited in connection with the accident.
- **Protection when purchasing a vehicle.** [Senate Bill 5388](#) would require that motor vehicle dealers and manufacturers disclose damage and repair to a new motor vehicle when selling a car, including to another dealer. The bill was amended in the Senate Labor, Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee to more closely align with how this is done in other states.
- **Naming chronically ill kids State Patrol "Chief for a Day."** [Senate Bill 5582](#) would allow the Washington State Patrol to partner with local law enforcement agencies and hospitals to name chronically ill children "chief for a day." The bill permits the Patrol to accept grant funds and gifts to facilitate the program, and allows the use of their facilities.
- **Keeping recreational opportunities available.** [Senate Bill 5422](#) would address a challenge that the Chelan County Public Utility District faces in keeping the Chelan Gorge area, which runs between the Chelan Dam and the Columbian River, open to kayakers. The bill would help in the PUD meet the requirements put forward by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and provide the PUD with liability protection for the use of its land and the release of water for kayaking.

Measure would aim to help farmers secure enough workers for harvest

[Senate Bill 5831](#) would authorize the state Department of Employment Security to meet and negotiate with foreign representatives to import temporary guest workers for jobs in agriculture, construction and hospitality. If Washington was to create its own guest worker program, we would be just the second state in the nation to do so. Existing federal regulations allow employers to request guest worker visas for seasonal jobs. Because small- and medium-sized operations haven't on their own been able to participate in the federal guest worker visa program, some believe a state program is needed. The inaction by Congress to reform immigration laws while stepping up enforcement along U.S. borders has led to a shortage of workers at harvest time in Eastern Washington. Fruit has been left on trees, and much of what was picked was taken too late. A state guest worker visa program would make it easier for farmers to get workers.

(This measure will not be receiving a hearing in the Senate this year, but a similar House bill did receive a hearing February 11 in the [House Commerce and Labor Committee](#).)

In closing...

I hope these e-mails I send each week are informative to you. If any of your friends and neighbors would like to receive them as well, please have them send me an e-mail at Parlette.Linda@leg.wa.gov. We'd be delighted to add them to our list.

All the best,

Linda

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For information about public hearings, proposed new laws, and the progress of bills you are interested in, please visit the Legislature's Information Web site at www.leg.wa.gov.